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S E C R E T STATE 003902

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/14/2019
TAGS: KNNP PARM PGOV PREL GG RS
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN UPDATE ON SUKHUMI RADIOACTIVE SOURCES

REF: A. 08 STATE 126999
 B. 08 MOSCOW 3605
 C. 08 TBILISI 2172

Classified By: Anita Friedt for Reasons 1.4 B and D.

¶11. (U) This is an action request for Embassies Tbilisi and Moscow. See para 6.

¶12. (C) In response to Ref A request for GOR update on the status of radiation sources that had been located in Sukhumi, working-level Russian MFA contacts were unable to provide definitive information about these sources (Ref B), and even speculated that they were still in Abkhazia. During a session of the Strategic Security Dialogue in Moscow on December 15, Acting U/S Rood followed up with DFM Ryabkov and later with Rosatom Deputy Director Spasskiy by providing the non-paper in para 3. In response, on December 31, Russian Embassy Political Counselor Rybachenkov passed to T/FO the non-paper in para 4. While passing the non-paper, Rybachenkov noted that the sources had been removed to a safe place in Russia, and requested that this information be treated as confidential and not be made public.

¶13. (C) Begin text of U.S. non-paper:

December 15, 2008

Non-paper on Radioactive Sources in Sukhumi

The United States Government has sought the safe removal of highly radioactive sources from storage at the Sukhumi Institute of Physics and the Sukhumi Institute for Experimental Pathology, as these sources remain vulnerable to theft, diversion, or malicious use in a radiological dispersal device. We are concerned that security at these facilities is not commensurate with the potential threat posed by these materials.

We ask the Russian Federation to consider again the safe and expeditious removal of these high-activity and other radioactive sources to a more secure location. We note Rosatom's interest, as stated in 2007, to resolve this security threat on a practical, non-political basis and we trust that all interested parties would treat the security of the material as their paramount concern. We would appreciate any updated information on the sources or their present circumstances, in the interest of seeing this nonproliferation issue successfully resolved.

End text.

¶14. (C) Begin text of December 31, 2008, Russian non-paper, received in English only:

In view of the current military and political situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a team of specialists undertook a series of measures on the premises of the Sukhumi Physics and Technology Institute and the Experimental Pathology and

Therapy Research Institute of the Abkhaz Academy of Sciences in August-September of 2008, which allowed to remove away (sic) all radiation sources and place them in conditions that guarantee their reliable physical protection and radiological safety.

Government Corporation Rosatom has inspected the execution of the work and indicates that the radiation background throughout the premises of the above-mentioned institutes corresponds to the natural level.

End text.

¶ 15. (C) Washington is satisfied that the Russian non-paper and comments address U.S. concerns regarding these sources and their security; at this point, no further inquiries or actions regarding their security are required.

¶ 16. (C) Action request for Embassy Tbilisi: Per concerns expressed in Ref C, Washington requests that Embassy inform GOG interlocutors of this development, using the points in para 7. The text of the Russian non-paper may not be passed to Georgian officials. Action request for Embassy Moscow: Please thank the GOR for its prompt response to the December 15 non-paper as well as its prompt action on this matter, and encourage continued vigilance on such nuclear security concerns.

¶ 17. (S//REL GEORGIA) Begin points:

-- As previously indicated, we have inquired with the Government of Russia about the status of the radiation sources that had been located in Sukhumi.

-- In response, we have received credible assurances from senior levels in the Government of Russia that the sources have been removed to safe storage and the facilities in which they were stored are now cleaned out.

-- This development has resolved our concerns regarding the security of these sources.

IF ASKED:

-- We were informed informally by the Russians that the location to which the sources were removed is in Russia.

End points.

¶ 18. (U) Post assistance is appreciated. Please slug responses for ISN/WMDT, EUR/PRA, EUR/RUS, and EUR/CARC.
RICE